

# Midwest Natural Resources Group

## Communications Committee

### Communications Plan

#### I. Introduction

The Midwest Natural Resources Group (MNRG) was formally established in 1998 as a forum for federal agency senior executives to obtain proactive coordination of funded natural resource-oriented activities and to clearly establish the proper natural resource-related role of those appropriate federal bureaus situated within the Upper Mississippi River, Missouri River, Ohio River and the Great Lakes watersheds.

According to its Charter, the **purpose of the MNRG** is to seek opportunities for collaboration and communication by:

1. sharing best agency practices and identifying common issues, coordinating actions, resolving conflicts, and enhancing the effectiveness of existing funded natural resource efforts being undertaken;
2. exploring and committing to new opportunities for cooperation, collaboration and action at the regional and local scales;
3. promoting the maximum efficient use of agency resources within existing systems while not creating new levels of bureaucracy;
4. improving agencies' ability to achieve their strategic plans;
5. reporting cooperative accomplishments in order to promote greater understanding and awareness of the high environmental and socio-economic values and needs of the region's natural resources;
6. garnering federal focus and fiscal support toward the enhancement of these resources; and
7. providing enhanced accountability to the public and better utilization of limited resources to reap maximum benefits for the natural resources, environment and people of the Midwest .

With this purpose in mind, the **organizational goal of the MNRG** is to function as a partnership of federal agency executives that advocate excellence in federal activities in support of the health, vitality, and sustainable stewardship of natural resource systems within the Upper Mississippi River, Missouri River, Ohio River and Great Lakes watersheds. The MNRG aims to achieve this overarching goal through enhanced communications, coordination and collaboration on mutually recognized resource issues and by providing timely interagency assistance where needed for the benefit of the American public.

## II. Definitions

**A. MNRG Agency Members:** The MNRG is comprised of senior executives and the appropriate staff from the following Federal agencies: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Energy, Federal Highway Administration, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Office of Surface Mining, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey.

**B. States within the MNRG Region:** The MNRG's region includes the following states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

**C. Major River Basins and Lakes within the MNRG:** Illinois River, Minnesota River, Missouri River, Ohio River, Ozark Plateau, St Croix River, and Upper Mississippi River, Detroit River/St Clair River, Fox River/Green Bay, Saginaw River and Bay, Southern Lake Erie, and Southern Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes in general.

## III. Goals

The key communication goals of the Midwest Natural Resources Group are as follows:

- Provide an umbrella communications plan for the MNRG;
- Facilitate communications between and among MNRG members, partners, and targeted audiences;
- Educate and inform targeted audiences about the goals of the MNRG to improve and enhance understanding and support for improving the natural resources of the Midwest;
- Inform targeted audiences about the successes (including efficiencies of shared resources) of partnerships;
- Demonstrate a shared vision among the 13 agencies of the MNRG;
- Communicate the message “partnership in action” to targeted audiences;
- Communicate with targeted audiences in plain, understandable language using one voice.

## IV. Key Targeted Audiences

The following audiences have been identified as the key targeted audiences for the purposes of this communications plan:

**A. Agency Communications:** Internal and inter-agency personnel and their senior management;

**B. General Public:** Special interest groups and the public at-large;

**C. Members of Congress:** Members of Congressional, Congressional staff, Congressional committees, special Congressional task forces.

## V. MNRG Communications Message

Fourteen Federal agencies, with natural resource missions, are successfully working together in a dynamic partnership to promote excellence in federal activities in support of the health, vitality, and sustainable stewardship of natural resource systems within the Upper Mississippi River, Missouri River, Ohio River and Great Lakes watersheds.

## **VI. Communications Messages to Targeted Audiences**

- The organizational goal of the MNRG is to function as a partnership of federal agency executives that advocate excellence in federal activities in support of the health, vitality, and sustainable stewardship of natural resource systems within the Upper Mississippi River, Missouri River, Ohio River and Great Lakes watersheds. The MNRG aims to achieve this overarching goal through enhanced communications, coordination and collaboration on mutually recognized resource issues and by providing timely interagency assistance where needed for the benefit of the American public.
- The MNRG partnership provides its member agencies with an organization through which they can more easily and effectively marshal their collective resources and focus on addressing and resolving natural resource-related issues and problems within the Midwest that could not be accomplished as well alone.
- The MNRG draws its strength from the commonalities – as well as the unique differences – among its member agencies. This provides the partnership with a wide range of capabilities with which to explore new opportunities. It also allows it to address natural resource issues using a collaborative approach that works to eliminate unnecessary duplication while maximizing the efficient use of taxpayer dollars through cost-effective problem-solving.
- The MNRG is analyzing federal and non-federal partnership activities in terms of (1) coordination, identification and enhancement of existing efforts being undertaken by federal and non-federal partners; and (2) exploration of, and commitment to, new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration in the Midwest.
- The Midwest is of critical economic importance to the nation by virtue of its rich assemblage of natural resources. These resources are particularly valued for their contributions to supporting plant and animal habitat, aesthetics, agriculture, water quality and quantity, public and private lands, cultural history, education, recreation, navigation, flood management, power generation, tourism, transportation and economic development.
- The MNRG is making it easier for the public to contact and interact with federal agencies within the Midwest by providing a web site for “one stop shopping” with regard to Midwestern natural resource issues and inquiries involving its member agencies. This will improve the public’s ability to navigate an often confusing array of federal agencies and to obtain appropriate assistance from these agencies to meet their needs and enhance the quality of life for citizens in the Midwest.
- Dedicated to excellence and service to the American people, the MNRG partnership is *producing tangible accomplishments* for the Midwest and presents these on its web site.
- Federal agencies are addressing some of their critical mission goals, as mandated by the Government Performance and Results Act, through their participation in the MNRG, and reporting results, progress, and successes to members of Congress and the American people.

## **VII. Strategies for Collaboration and Communication**

The following strategies have been identified for use by the MNRG's Communications Committee for the purpose of promoting opportunities for effective collaboration and communication in support of the MNRG's purpose and to help it achieve its organizational goal, as defined in Section I above. Major emphasis is placed on utilization of the MNRG's web site and its features as *the common and primary forum* where organizational information, "tools," documents, archives and contacts can be accessed and shared.

**A. Sharing best agency practices and identifying common issues, coordinating actions, resolving conflicts, and enhancing the effectiveness of existing funded natural resource efforts being undertaken.**

- Best agency practices can be shared through presentations at the MNRG's Annual Meeting and by contacting the Communications Committee Chair to arrange for posting "best practices" on the MNRG web site.
- Common issues can be identified and shared on an ongoing basis by agency senior executives during the "Agency Updates" segment of their regular meetings and through the wider forum presented during the Annual Meeting.
- Coordination of agency actions can take place not only at formal MNRG conferences, but should ideally occur on an ongoing basis among the appropriate parties. This coordination can be facilitated through the "Members" section of the MNRG web site where contact information can be found.
- Conflict resolution can be conducted informally during regularly scheduled MNRG meetings or through specially arranged meetings and teleconferences where MNRG representatives can function as neutral mediators. Please contact the current MNRG Chair or Vice-Chair to make special arrangements.
- The effectiveness of existing funded natural resource efforts can be enhanced by MNRG members through interagency collaboration and communication; through the reduction or elimination of unnecessary duplication at all appropriate levels; through the sharing of information and agency personnel, as available and appropriate; and by leveraging funding resources among agencies and other organizations.

**B. Exploring and committing to new opportunities for cooperation, collaboration and action at the regional and local scales.**

- MNRG activities and accomplishments, together with contact information for MNRG members, will be regularly posted to the web site to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, collaboration and innovation regarding sustainable natural resources stewardship. Non-MNRG members can still learn of the organization's activities and make initial contact with MNRG members through the Chair of the Communications Committee, whose contact information is posted. Regularly scheduled MNRG meetings – especially the Annual Meeting – offer opportunities for members and non-members alike to explore and commit to new opportunities for cooperation, collaboration and action at the regional and local scales.

**C. Promoting the maximum efficient use of agency resources within existing systems while not creating new levels of bureaucracy.**

- The MNRG is not a “project-driven” organization but is “results-driven” instead. As such, it will not seek to invent new projects for itself as much as it will seek to identify existing situations where MNRG participation through enhanced communications, coordination and collaboration on mutually recognized resource issues can provide timely interagency assistance where needed and help to make a positive contribution or beneficial difference in promoting the health, vitality, and sustainable stewardship of natural resource systems within the Upper Mississippi River, Missouri River, Ohio River and Great Lakes watersheds for the benefit of the American public.
- The MNRG will strive to work within existing agency administrative structures to the extent practicable. If it becomes necessary to create special committees or groups to accomplish an MNRG-related task, those committees or groups will be designed to be temporary in duration and will cease to exist upon the successful completion of the assigned task. In addition, member agencies should investigate whether or not non-MNRG groups already exist for the identified task so that MNRG personnel can join with them as necessary and appropriate.

#### **D. Improving MNRG agencies’ abilities to achieve their strategic plans.**

- The Strategic Plans for MNRG member agencies will be available for reference through the individual web sites for those agencies with links to those agency sites through the MNRG’s web site. Member agencies are encouraged to make their needs, as defined within their Strategic Plans, known to colleagues in conjunction with MNRG-related activities.

#### **E. Reporting cooperative accomplishments in order to promote greater understanding and awareness of the high environmental and socio-economic values and needs of the region's natural resources.**

- Cooperative accomplishments related to the MNRG will be posted on the MNRG’s web site under “Accomplishments” as they become available. These reports will be displayed for a reasonable length of time and then removed for posting to the “Archives” section of the web site.

#### **F. Garnering federal focus and fiscal support toward the enhancement of these [natural] resources.**

- The Communications Committee will prepare special reports and other informational materials to inform Congress (including Congressional members, Congressional staff, Congressional committees and special Congressional Task Forces) in order to promote the MNRG and its activities. These materials should demonstrate that the Midwest is a nationally-critical area in terms of both its natural resources and its value to the nation’s economy. These values include: agriculture, water supply, water quality, fish, wildlife and plant biodiversity, cultural history, aesthetic beauty, navigation, flood management, recreation, power generation, transportation, economic development and tourism. These materials should also present evidence that this partnership:
  1. enables agencies to more easily and effectively identify and solve problems which cannot be done agency by agency; and
  2. views the unique differences of agencies, as well as their commonly held goals, as strength; and can apply these qualities to efficiently and cost-effectively solve problems and explore new opportunities to benefit people and the natural resources of the Midwest.
- In addition, these reports should inform Congress that 13 Federal agencies are addressing aspects of their critical missions (as mandated by the Government Performance and Results Act) by successfully working together and marshaling their collective resources to address natural resource issues and goals within the Midwest.

- The Communications Committee should assemble a promotional package of MNRG materials for those Members of Congress in whose districts the MNRG has active projects or activities and accomplishments. These same promotional packages should be assembled for the governors and Departments of Natural Resources (or their equivalent) of those states within the MNRG region that have similarly benefited from the interagency organization's work.
- The Communications Committee will revise and update the existing MNRG brochure as a tool for promoting the MNRG to Congress and to other organizations. Brand recognition of the MNRG can be enhanced by developing a subtitle to the organization's logo, such as: "*MNRG: A Dynamic Partnership Promoting Natural Resource Sustainability.*"
- The MNRG at all levels should encourage Congressional representatives to visit MNRG projects areas. These visits will help them to better understand the work of the MNRG and will demonstrate the impact of the MNRG on the quality of life of their constituents.

**G. Providing enhanced accountability to the public and better utilization of limited resources to reap maximum benefits for the natural resources, environment and people of the Midwest.**

- In addition, these reports should inform Congress that 13 Federal agencies are addressing aspects of their critical missions (as mandated by the Government Performance and Results Act) by successfully working together and marshaling their collective resources to address natural resource issues and goals within the Midwest.

## **VIII. Role of the Communications Committee**

The MNRG Communications Committee was established to coordinate and disseminate MNRG- related and produced information and material to the membership and interested public. ***The overall purpose of the Committee is to leverage the positive results of MNRG projects and foster a broader base of support, understanding and recognition of key natural resource issues, opportunities, challenges and accomplishments.*** The Committee also communicates the federal partnership's policy and perspectives on member agencies' activities related to the MNRG's purpose and organizational goal to Congress, partners, the public, and internally within each agency.

The Communications Committee produces the overall Communications Plan for the MNRG, which focuses on integrated communication involving all MNRG agencies and projects, and provides advice to the organization's senior executives on communications-related matters. As appropriate, the Communications Committee will produce, or oversee the production of, marketing documents, communications messages, or news releases on the accomplishments of the organization's overall effort or the effort of individual teams. The Committee also has responsibility for the ongoing management of the MNRG's web site and its features.

Each MNRG member agency is required to appoint ***and commit*** a representative to serve on the Communications Committee ***for the purpose of actively participating in and contributing to the business and undertakings of the Committee.*** The MNRG Vice-Chair is responsible for appointing the Chair of the Communications Committee.

The MNRG senior executives meet twice per year: first through an Executive Business Meeting in the Spring and second, through an MNRG Annual Meeting in the Fall. The Chair of the MNRG may call for additional special meetings and/or teleconferences as needed. The MNRG's Planning Committee is responsible for arranging for meeting notes and proceedings to be transmitted to the Communications Committee for posting by the latter to the organization's web site, as appropriate.

Special Initiative Teams designated by the MNRG are responsible for coordinating the reporting and publication of their results with the Communications Committee.

## **IX. Standard Operating Procedures for MNRG Communications by Member Agencies**

- It is understood that MNRG Communications Committee members that are present at meetings make decisions. Absent members abide by those decisions.
- Every effort will be made by the Chair to schedule Committee events, meetings, and conference calls to allow for members' schedules and availability. If a member of the Communications Committee cannot attend or participate in a scheduled event, meeting, or conference call, that member is required to inform the Chair of their anticipated absence in a timely manner *prior* to the said meeting.
- Communications Committee members are expected to work together cooperatively and to be able to rely upon one another, as needed, to get tasks accomplished.
- All members are expected to provide review and comments on Committee products in a timely manner.
- When engaging in MNRG-related or sponsored activities, member agencies and special teams should use the organization's logo (available on the MNRG members' web site) to identify these activities or products as sponsored by the MNRG.
- MNRG agencies should use the available MNRG letterhead in MNRG-related communications as well as the approved MNRG press release form (both available through the organization's members' web site) for distributing information to the press or to other organizations.
- MNRG agencies are welcome to use the "Award for Conservation Excellence" (ACE) document to recognize those individuals who make outstanding contributions to the organization or to the environment. This document is available on the organization's members' web site.

## **IX. Evaluation and Revision of the Communications Plan**

This Communications Plan is considered to be a "living" document. As such, it will be reviewed by the Communications Committee once every year following the MNRG's Annual Meeting to incorporate new information or recommendations and to determine if minor revisions or adjustments are necessary to maintain the plan's maximum effectiveness for the organization.

- Draft revisions of the plan will be submitted to the MNRG senior executives for their review and comments. The plan will then undergo final revision and will be presented to the senior executives for their approval.
- If the Communications Committee determines that the plan in its entirety is no longer addressing or effectively supporting the needs of the organization, then a comprehensive revision will be undertaken.